

**THE EXPERIENCES GAINED DURING THE PROCESS OF THE
TRANSLATION OF
ANTON PAVLOVICH CHEKHOV'S PLAY
FATHERLESSNESS (БЕЗОТЦОВИЩНА)**

THESIS FOR THE DOCTOR'S DEGREE

My work contains the translation of Anton Pavlovich Chekhov's play Fatherlessness. The essay attached to it reflects on the facts and experiences gained during the process of the translation.

Motivation

As a dramaturg I work with texts of plays many of them written in foreign languages, which has kindled my interest about the importance of the translation in general. While helping to put on stage the various adaptations of Chekhov's plays or even just reading them I couldn't help noticing the difference between the translations and the original text. Chekhov's texts have been approached differently by translators and other men of letters not only according to the tastes or literal and translational trends of their time but to their play-analysis and opinion of Chekhov, the man and playwright. The realization of these differences focused my attention on how the characters of the author and that of the translator could be connected. But my interest had been purely theoretical for quite a long time.

In 2001, during the process of preparation for a theatrical performance¹ I started reading, selecting and translating the correspondence of Anton Pavlovich Chekhov. At that time I translated onehundred-twenty letters written by or to Chekhov, and the following year after having read hundreds of other letters I increased the number of the already translated letters by another hundred. I organised these twohundred-twenty letters by relating the history of Chekhov's two important love stories and completed them with a large number of annotations.

¹ Loves of Chekhov, Új Színház, 2002. directed by Kiss Csaba

In 2002 the letters were published in a book.² The two years I spent translating Chekhov's letter and reconstructing his character and life had great impact on me. My former acknowledgement or respect towards Chekhov's art had taken on a certain personal interest. I got deeply impressed by his ironic view of life, his strong sense of justice and his style which showed through even in his personal writing. The theoretical interest I had felt on reading the various translations of his plays, after having examined his letters and other documents, soon became a thorough grounding. What's more, before I finally got to Chekhov's work I had translated some works of Pushkin³, Brussov⁴ and Presniakov brothers⁵ and I had also made translations of a couple of English plays.

So, when five years after the letters were published I had the opportunity to translate Chekhov's dramatic plays, I wasn't a rookie on the field of translation, I just hadn't had the chance to get into such a connection with the works of a playwright I had studied and felt closest to me. During my work the documents I read, the experiences I got by examining the different translations of Chekhov's plays took on a new meaning. It became important to me to approach the *Fatherlessness* with the utmost understanding of the play.

The primary goal of my work was to come out with a new, valid translation of the *Fatherlessness*, which stands the test of time and follows the original play in meaning and style.⁶

The structure of the essay attached to the translation

The essay attached to my translation reflects on the facts and experiences gained during the process of the translation. The essay contains two chapters.

Apart from a valid translation my main goal was to create a theatrical text which could help the realisation of the play and give priority to the practical aspects of any stage-performance. For this reason my translation was intertwined with a dramaturgical and

² Loves of Chekhov, Budapest, Magvető, 2002.

³ Pushkin: *Boris Godunov*, with János Térey, Madách Kamara, 2002.

⁴ Briusov-Prokofiev: *The fiery angel*, libretto, with Balázs Kovalik, 2003.

⁵ Oleg and Vladimir Presniakov: *Terrorism*, Szolnoki Szigligeti Theater, 2004.

⁶ The translation based on: Чехов А. П. Полное собрание сочинений и писем: В 30 т. (Collected works and correspondancy of A.P. Chekhov 30 kötetben) Т.11. Пьесы, 1878-1888 (11. Plays 1878-1888.) Moscow, Nauka, 1974-1982. 5-180.

analytical approach. The first part of the essay presents the various impressions and experiences gained during and after the process of translation by the comparison of the different achievements of different translators and translating techniques. Although translational theories belong to the realm of linguistics rather than to that of literature, I used some of translational theories' technical terms and usages for the unambiguous interpretations of the description of hardships and problems in the translations.

Following this in the Appendix I describe the factual knowledge gained during the preparations for the translation which can essentially help the work of the translator. Since the main pillar of my essay was the translation of the *Fatherlessness*, the best possible understanding of Chekhov's play became my priority. Because of this the Appendix focuses mainly on the life of the playwright, his personal and artistical circumstances at the time of writing and the genesis of the play. In the documents used for this purpose I gave priority to the original sources such as letters and memoirs of Chekhov's contemporaries, although some other works were also used in the form of quotations and references.

Translating something always involves a series of decisions, and the making of them contains many intuitive and subconscious elements even if its object seems to be set. Becoming familiar with the author and his work helps the translator to make immediate decisions by relying on the translator's factual knowledge.

I intended to make a translation that is valid in text but not strict in the actual time of the plot, so it could serve as material for different interpretations from classical to contemporary.